

VZCZCXRO5687
PP RUEHAO
DE RUEHCV #0494/01 0532109
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 222109Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3322
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6047
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5207
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1026
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1695
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9900
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0993
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1767
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0793
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3278
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0618
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0309
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2848
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0509

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000494

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER
FRC FT LAUDERDALE FOR CLAMBERT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ NATURALIZES COLOMBIANS TO GET VOTES

REF: CARACAS 00219

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) In an effort to reach President Chavez' goal of obtaining 10 million votes in December's presidential elections, the BRV is using the tried and true method of stuffing the voter registry by naturalizing migrants and handing out identification cards through its Mision Identidad (Mission Identity) program. The program, which was started in October 2003, was intended to give identification cards to the disenfranchised poor that, up until that time, had no official government identification. However, true to form, the Chavez government has politicized this social service and used it to improve its electoral standing. Official figures for 2005 are unavailable, but estimates indicate that between 400,000 and 500,000 foreigners have been naturalized through Mision Identidad since its inception. With presidential elections in December, it will be in the BRV's interest to naturalize many more in 2006. End Summary.

Mision Identidad

¶2. (U) Established in October 2003, Mision Identidad is one of a number of broad-based social programs known as "missions" and is administered by the National Office of Identification and Naturalization (ONIDEX). It was designed to give identification to the many disenfranchised poor Venezuelans who, up to that point, had no official government identification. Without Venezuelan identification, these people were unable to vote or obtain benefits from many social services. According to the BRV, when the program started, 70% of Venezuelan citizens were without identification, a figure that has reportedly decreased to around 30% of the population now.

Political Tool

13. (C) The BRV has unabashedly used the Mision Identidad program as a tool for garnering more votes for President Chavez. Most of the Mision Identidad employees are avowed Chavistas and the implication is clear that applicants are expected to vote for Chavez. Too, part of the rationale is that formerly cedula-less individuals -- whether Venezuelan by birth or not -- would be especially grateful to the Chavez government and would show that gratitude at the ballot box. In a recent parade in the state of Aragua, Mision Identidad employees proudly wore Chavez t-shirts and held up ten fingers in support of the President's goal of getting ten million votes in December's presidential election. With a voting registry of only 14.7 million people, it is likely that Mision Identidad, in conjunction with the National Electoral Council (CNE) will play an important role in achieving this goal. Director of the CNE Jorge Rodriguez has stated his desire to increase the number of registered voters to nearly 17 million before the December elections.

Rapid Naturalization and Identification

14. (S/NF) Much of this is done through "mass naturalizations" where Mision Identidad sends volunteers and mobile processing units to border states like Zulia and Tachira where they give citizenship to as many as 25,000

CARACAS 00000494 002 OF 002

people in a single day, mostly Colombians. Mision Identidad also uses these events to give out identification to Venezuelan citizens who need it. Embassy sources report that little if any documentation is needed for this process.

15. (C) Since its inception in 2003 through 2004, the BRV naturalized 298,941 Colombian immigrants through the Mision Identidad program according to UNHCR (please protect). Official numbers for 2005 have yet to be released, but the BRV's goal was to naturalize 200,000 more during the year. Based on press reporting of mass naturalizations throughout the country it seems likely that this goal was reached (Note: As with most statistics in Venezuela, the numbers are murky at best and repeated Embassy requests to meet with ONIDEX for clarity were declined.)

16. (U) According to ONIDEX, in addition to naturalizations, Mision Identidad has delivered 10 million identification cards to Venezuelan citizens since the inception of the program. Of these eight million, reportedly 1.8 million were given to Colombians through a residency visa or the aforementioned naturalization certificate.

Corruption

17. (S/NF) As we have reported previously, ONIDEX and Mision Identidad are rife with corruption and also getting assistance from Cubans to help expand the electoral registry (reftel). These sources report that identification cards can be easily obtained with little or no verification of identity by the Mision Identidad employees. Furthermore, in 2005 ONIDEX reported that 2,000,000 identification cards had been lost or stolen, all of which could conceivably be used to give the BRV some wiggle room in the next election.

Very Popular, Very Political

18. (U) Because so many poor people have gone without any

identification during previous governments, the Mision Identidad program has been one of the most popular of the missions. According to Datanalysis, a Venezuelan polling firm, 22.5% of Venezuelans claim to be beneficiaries of Mision Identidad. But, approval for Mision Identidad extends well beyond those who benefit directly, boasting a national approval rating of 61.2%.

Comment

19. (C) Like most other public services in Venezuela, Mision Identidad is frequently used as a political tool by the BRV. This fact doesn't, however, seem to influence the opinions of the broader Venezuelan electorate who show very high approval ratings for the program. In the end, Chavez won't reach his goal of ten million votes through Mision Identidad alone. In all likelihood, even with a sustained campaign, the BRV would have a hard time naturalizing more than 200,000 people before next year's election. But, this combined with the estimated 400,000-500,000 that have already been naturalized, adds significantly to Chavez' electoral base.
WHITAKER